

**30 years
War**





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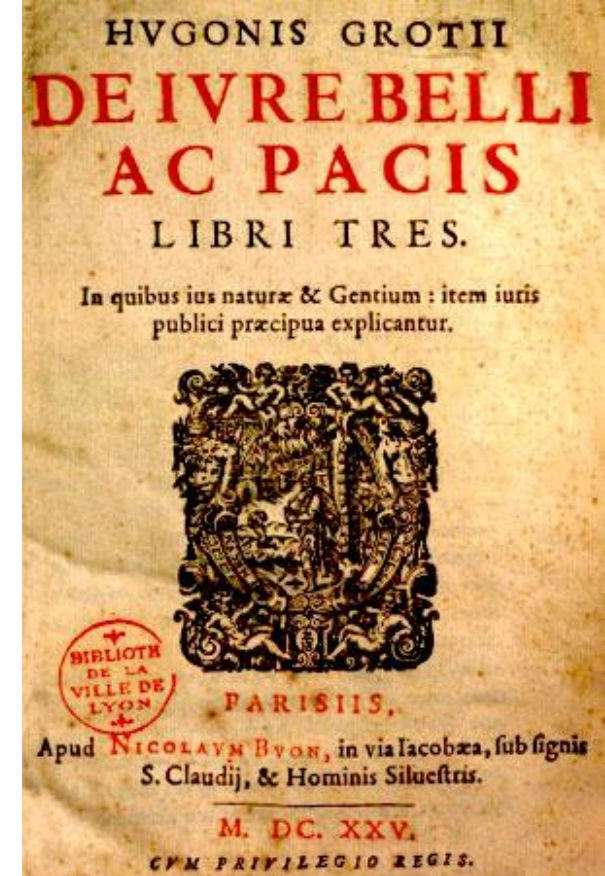
30 years War



The Thirty Years War is one of the great pivotal occurrences for the social and political makeup of Europe and especially the so-called “German-speaking lands.” The hegemonic power of the Hapsburg Empire in Europe was forever broken by the financial and human toll of the war, as well as by the loss of the Lowlands. The role of European superpower was assumed by newly ascendant France, which had prospered greatly at the expense of the Hapsburg Empire through the expert political maneuvering of Cardinal Richelieu among the diverse forces opposing the Holy Roman Emperor. Borders were redrawn in the wake of the war, notably to reflect France’s annexation of Alsace-Lorraine, an act with enduring consequences for centuries to come. The various German states, always variably independent in the heyday of the Holy Roman Empire, now existed as literally hundreds of disparate sovereignties. All this at the price of a war which remains a scar on German national memory even into the modern day. In the historiography of the Thirty Years War, there is a marked tendency to focus on the horror of war, on the conflict’s raw destructiveness. The evidence of the desolation is staggering; thirty years of fighting, sieges, plundering, plague, and instability left the area we today call Germany with possibly a third of its population dead from starvation and disease, crops ravaged, entire villages and towns obliterated, and a defunct economy. These facts stand as the lasting legacy of the war. Accepting them at face value, however, only leads to even greater confusion and misunderstanding of conflict at this time. Upon noting the widespread devastation of the Thirty Years War, many are quick to attribute it to excessive barbarity and cruelty on the part of the combatants. As a religious war, at David Lederer, “The Myth of the All-Destructive War: Afterthoughts on German Sufferin



Hugo Grotius, considered the father of the law of nations and the first to conduct a comprehensive work on systematizing the international laws of war, *De jure belli ac pacis* (1625), concluded that rape (phrased as "the violation of women") "should not go unpunished in war any more than in peace", rejecting the view that it is permissible to inflict damage or harm "on anything belonging to the enemy"



The violation of women [in wartime] is variously regarded as permitted or not. Those who allow it consider only the injury done to the person, which they hold it agreeable to the law of arms to inflict on anything belonging to the enemy. The other opinion is better: it takes into account not only the injury but also the act of unbridled lust and concludes that something pertaining to neither safety nor punishment should be no more lawful in war than in peace. This latter view is not the law of all nations, but it is the law of the more respectable ones.



Emmerich van Vattel emerged as an influential figure when he pleaded for the immunity of civilians against the ravages of war, considering men and women civilians as non-combatants



Gustavus Adolphus (9 December [N.S 19 December] 1594 – 6 November [N.S 16 November] 1632), also known in English as Gustav II Adolf or Gustav II Adolph, was King of Sweden from 1611 to 1632, and is credited with the rise of Sweden as a great European power (Swedish: Stormaktstiden). During his reign, Sweden became one of the primary military forces in Europe during the Thirty Years' War, helping to determine the political and religious balance of power in Europe. He was formally and posthumously given the name Gustavus Adolphus the Great (Swedish: Gustav Adolf den store; Latin: Gustavus Adolphus Magnus) by the Riksdag of the Estates in 1634.





**Frederick V
of the
Palatinate**



**Maximilian I,
Elector of Bavaria
whose seizure of
the Palatinate
expanded the war**



Albrecht von Wallenstein achieved great military success for the Empire but his power threatened both Ferdinand and the German princes.



Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden, known as the "Lion of the North", at the Battle of Breitenfeld in 1631



Siege and capture of Casale Monferrato by French troops, 1630



After Swedish plundering in Brandenburg (1631) endangered the system of retrieving war contributions from occupied territories, "marauding and plundering" by Swedish soldiers was prohibited. Meanwhile, a Catholic army under Johann Tserclaes, Count of Tilly was laying waste to Saxony. Gustavus Adolphus met Tilly's army and won a decisive victory at the First Battle of Breitenfeld in September 1631. He then marched across Germany, establishing his winter quarters near the Rhine, making plans for the invasion of the rest of the Holy Roman Empire.



The Sack of Magdeburg, also called Magdeburg's Wedding (German: Magdeburger Hochzeit) or Magdeburg's Sacrifice (Magdeburgs Opfergang), was the destruction of the Protestant city of Magdeburg on 20 May 1631 by the Imperial Army and the forces of the Catholic League, resulting in the deaths of around 20,000, including both defenders and civilians. This event is considered the worst massacre of the Thirty Years' War. Magdeburg, then one of the largest cities in modern-day Germany, and having well over 25,000 inhabitants in 1630, did not recover its importance until well into the 18th century.

In March 1632, Gustavus Adolphus invaded Bavaria, an ally of the Emperor. He forced the withdrawal of his Catholic opponents at the Battle of Rain, marking the high point of the campaign. In the summer of that year, he sought a political solution that would preserve the existing structure of states in Germany, while guaranteeing the security of its Protestants. But achieving these objectives depended on his continued success on the battlefield.

Some other military actions in the Thirty Years' War with Gustavus Adolphus at the head were: the victorious battles of Frankfurt an der Oder and Werben, the botched Siege of Nuremberg, the Battle of Fürth, and the unfavourable Battle of the Alte Veste.



Battlefield view from the east: River Lech flows from right to center, then flows west (up) into Donau river. Town of Rain



**Death of Gustavus
Adolphus at
Lützen by
Carl Wahlbom
(1855)**



The Battle of Prague, which occurred between 25 July and 1 November 1648 was the last action of the Thirty Years' War. While the negotiations for the Peace of Westphalia were proceeding, Sweden took the opportunity to mount one last campaign into Bohemia. The main result, and probably the main aim, was to loot the fabulous art collection assembled in Prague Castle by Rudolf II, Holy Roman Emperor (1552–1612), the pick of which was taken down the Elbe in barges and shipped to Sweden.

Violence Against Civilians in the Thirty Years War

The Thirty Years War is one of the great pivotal occurrences for the social and political makeup of Europe and especially the so-called “German-speaking lands.” The hegemonic power of the Hapsburg Empire in Europe was forever broken by the financial and human toll of the war, as well as by the loss of the Lowlands. The role of European superpower was assumed by newly ascendant France, which had prospered greatly at the expense of the Hapsburg Empire through the expert political maneuvering of Cardinal Richelieu among the diverse forces opposing the Holy Roman Emperor. Borders were redrawn in the wake of the war, notably to reflect France’s annexation of Alsace-Lorraine, an act with enduring consequences for centuries to come. The various German states, always variably independent in the heyday of the Holy Roman Empire, now existed as literally hundreds of disparate sovereignties. All this at the price of a war which remains a scar on German national memory even into the modern day. In the historiography of the Thirty Years War, there is a marked tendency to focus on the horror of war, on the conflict’s raw destructiveness. The evidence of the desolation is staggering; thirty years of fighting, sieges, plundering, plague, and instability left the area we today call Germany with possibly a third of its population dead from starvation and disease, crops ravaged, entire villages and towns obliterated, and a defunct economy. These facts stand as the lasting legacy of the war. Accepting them at face value, however, only leads to even greater confusion and misunderstanding of conflict at this time. Upon noting the widespread devastation of the Thirty Years War, many are quick to attribute it to excessive barbarity and cruelty on the part of the combatants. As a religious war, at David Lederer, “The Myth of the All-Destructive War: Afterthoughts on German Sufferin



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least in its origins, it is easy to read the history of the war as a story of grudges set free upon a helpless population more concerned with cash and crops than with creed. Certainly many documents remaining from the era frame military successes and defeats in religious terms, and especially events of violence suffered. Further investigation, however, suggests an explanation for the violence perpetrated beyond religious fanaticism. Such fanaticism can be found if one searches for it, but appears to have been the exception rather than the rule. The war was devastating not because of a special vindictiveness in the soldiery, nor through failures of discipline, but because of the nature of occupation in warfare at the time.

The Traditional View

Ever since its happening, the Thirty Years War has been treated as the paradigm of inhuman violence with respect to civilians — at least up until the wars of the twentieth century. Take for instance the truly horrific Sack of Magdeburg. More than a century after its occurrence the great German poet Friedrich Schiller immortalized the razing of the maiden city in his *Geschichte des Dreyßigjährigen Kriegs* (History of the Thirty Years War). This event was historicized even in its direct aftermath as an act of unsurpassed barbarity, and continues to be interpreted in this way by some to this day. The tendency has been to wallow in the real violence of the war rather than to consider it in light of the material and social circumstances of the war. These two views, the emotional and the rational, cannot exist independent of each other. Emphasis on one at the expense of the other paints an unrealistic picture of the war as either one long, fully willed injustice or a clearly reasoned, justly executed calculation.



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Such horrors as the Sack of Magdeburg, unwarranted violence perpetrated on such a scale and with such intent, are scarcely to be believed. In fact, they should be critically evaluated. Were mass rape and torture for its own sake historical happenings, or exaggerations and additions of later commentators? Disgusting crimes undeniably occurred in the progress of the war, but the evidence of contemporary accounts suggests that these were real but isolated events, reflective of the extremes to be found in war rather than of its regular conduct. As in wars today and throughout history, crimes and violence beyond the contemporary accepted standards of warfare constituted especially heinous exceptions rather than the norm for military behavior. From whence comes, then, this notion of the Thirty Years War as the exemplar of lawlessness against civilians?

17th Century Standards of Military Conduct. Let us consider first the standards of military conduct for the day. The armies engaged in the Thirty Years War existed between two eras of military reform. The sixteenth century had produced a class of proud, highly trained professional soldiers, adept with firearms and field tactics, men well-paid for their elite skill set. In the century following the Thirty Years War, by virtue of their bureaucracies the absolute-monarchical nation-states of the eighteenth century raised and operated vast forces composed of men drilled and standardized into rigid, disciplined units. In terms of quality the forces fighting the Thirty Years War lived up to neither. Armies were constantly levying troops from the general populace, a necessary practice in any extended conflict which always takes a heavy toll on an army's overall quality. The precision and professionalism of the previous age had dwindled and deteriorated without yet giving way to the uniform forces of the next century. The standards of military conduct for the seventeenth century reflected this.



They consumed their food and commandeered their livestock, worsening the shortages brought about by the ravages of war. filthy conditions of camp life carried disease with the movements of the armies. Soldiers were prone to fighting among each other and with locals, and not infrequently pursued and assaulted local women. None of these factors recommended soldiers to civilians' good graces. Grounds for Violence

On the one hand, the understanding of what was permissible action in war remained from the theorists of the sixteenth century. Notable among these was the Spanish monk Francisco de Vitoria, a theologian cum jurist active in the 1520s and 1530s at the university of Salamanca whose writings and lectures on law, politics, and war influenced European thought into the seventeenth century. In his discourse *On the Law of War*, de Vitoria carefully parses not only the defining characteristics of just war but also acceptable Christian conduct with respect to the enemy, enemy civilians, and enemy property. Christian religious language aside, many of de Vitoria's general standards find counterparts in the human rights standards of the twenty-first century: the innocent should not be harmed unless absolutely unavoidable, an affront or attack should be answered with proportionate force, and resources may be seized or destroyed to keep the enemy from using them for warlike purposes. However, as lofty—even constraining—as de Vitoria's standards may seem, he makes several concessions in practice to the varied circumstances of war in reality, particularly where booty and enemy civilians are concerned. Anthony Pagden and Jeremy Lawrence, introduction to *Political Writings*, ed. Anthony Pagden and Jeremy Lawrence (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), xiii-xvii. Francisco de Vitoria, *Political Writings*, De Vitoria's standards designate enemy civilians and their possessions as fair targets due to their being, politically speaking, extensions of the person of the offending monarch. While this permission set a precedent for acceptable attacks against civilians, it was not generally cited as the justification for looting; this was instead chalked up to supplying needs and soldiers' right to remuneration for their service. For that matter, the category "enemy civilians" is particularly difficult to define in the Thirty Years War. Both sides laid claims to the same territories, seeing themselves simultaneously as liberating angels and the righteous wrath of God. While many troops were imported from various corners of the Empire or foreign lands, many others were native Germans. Moreover, as shall be later elaborated upon, socially the Thirty Years War made De Vitoria concede that because the goods of the innocent populace in the land of the enemy might be used against an army with just cause, it is within the purview of the soldiers of a just army to plunder these innocents for their own security.



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Moreover, de Vitoria permits that, in a case of war to gain just redress for some injury, whether between nations or in case of a monarch avenging an attack on some part of his constituency, compensation and satisfaction may be taken from the technically innocent populace of the enemy. Just as they and their possessions are the offending party's responsibility and under his protection, so are they his property from which recompense may be drawn. Booty taken for this purpose is supposed to be proportionate to the magnitude of the initial offense, but this immediately opens a vast grey area of interpretation. Likewise, protection of innocent life, though often reiterated as an imperative, becomes difficult to practice and harder to inspire. Finally, de Vitoria concludes that it is natural law that "to the victor belong the spoils In the Thirty Years War in particular it was understood that soldiers were entitled to various kinds of booty and supplies from the locales they occupied, both from the standards of conduct set out by de Vitoria and because large quantities of the war's combatants were mercenaries. Even more than the ostensible causes for fighting, it was vital at the ground level Wilson discusses specifically what is meant by the term "mercenary" in the context of the Thirty Years War; he interprets the word to mean not so much "hireling" as "serving the highest bidder." that the conduct of war be profitable. The imperial generalissimo Albrecht von Wallenstein famously contrived a political and tactical strategy for what was from his perspective a selffinancing war that would make his personal fortune. He embraced the prospect of supplying an army as much as possible simply with the resources of the land. In a similar vein, access to German wealth was an allure to external allies of the Protestant party, whether in the form of riches promised in return for assistance — riches which would somehow be collected from the regions — or in whatever could be reaped from the war-torn landscape. It is important also to remember the historical model of tax and tribute collection: the requirements of a higher authority would be accrued by lower agents, with a surplus that formed their profit; this model was repeated with each new link in the chain. This system also worked in reverse: as a given shipment of supplies was delivered, some cut of the haul would be kept by the carriers, then a bit more by the officers, and yet more by the quartermasters, leaving the general soldiery perpetually undersupplied. This only exacerbated the provisioning problem.



In 1639 the people of the village of Rambach near Mainz beseeched their landowner not to hold them responsible for provisioning troops. In their letter of supplication they catalogued the resources of the entire village: two cows, one plow, one oxen no sheep, horses, or pigs remained.

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Logistics are also important in considering the scale of the war. The vast majority of the fighting and military movements of the Thirty Years War were confined to the area of the Holy Roman Empire represented by modern Germany. For centuries, the regional economies of this area had supported the local population and, occasionally, armies for limited periods of time. In the Thirty Years War, however, these areas were subjected to decades of unrelenting occupation. Army succeeded army in the cycle of victory and loss that quickly consumed all the surplus these lands had to offer, followed by all of their necessities. For the most part the peasants of these communities did not concern themselves with whether the army currently in residence in their village was technically “on their side”; all soldiers were enemies. They consumed their food and commandeered their livestock, worsening the shortages brought about by the ravages of war. filthy conditions of camp life carried disease with the movements of the armies. Soldiers were prone to fighting among each other and with locals, and not infrequently pursued and assaulted local women. None of these factors recommended soldiers to civilians’ good graces.

Grounds for Violence The related issues of provisioning and booty bring us to the thorny topic of the peasant/ soldier relationship in the Thirty Years War. For civilians on both sides of the war, enemy troops were naturally just that — the enemy, a threat to life, limb, and livelihood to be feared when powerful and spurned when possible. However, beyond this entirely explicable fear, civilians felt threatened by the forces of their own side, and not without cause. As troops were shunted and stationed among villages and regions, the local lords allotted to these communities the duties of provisioning and housing the troops from their own crops and possessions. Such a state of forced generosity, little better than occupation, was rarely if ever considered a boon by the communities supporting the army. In 1623, the Treffurt district of Thuringia in central Germany appealed to both the regional lord and to the Catholic field marshal Tilly for a lessening of their provisioning obligations to the imperial garrison; the people of Treffurt pleaded that their land could not support both them and the army. As the war wore on, it became more and more difficult for these regional communities to provide for armies; their surpluses had long ago been exhausted by provisioning, conquest, and personal needs for survival, soon followed by their supplies for regular needs and even the barest necessities.



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In 1697 Barbara Blenzig of Petershausen in the Dachau region of Bavaria was forced to leave her hometown pregnant and destitute when the soldier who had promised to marry her was transferred away, leaving her at the mercy of the civic inquest who mercilessly informed her that soldiers were not permitted to marry without the permission of their garrison commanders. These measures placed excessive responsibility on the shoulders of women who had found themselves involved with soldiers — sometimes voluntarily, often by force and trickery; such laws were unjust, but sought in desperation to combat a situation in which no legal force could be exerted over the soldiers themselves. Though these efforts affected soldiers' lives only indirectly, there was no question of them being the ultimate targets of the civil authorities' discrimination. Many civilians would readily lash out at soldiers, given the opportunity. As much as soldiers possessed strength in weapons and able bodies, civilians still owned the food and clothing that soldiers needed for survival, and they were not particularly inclined to generosity. In October of 1642, the commander of the Swedish garrison stationed at Olmütz in Moravia (modern-day Czech Republic) had to authorize some violence, and threaten more, in order to make sure that the citizenry would sufficiently provision his men for the winter. Colonel Robert Monro, commander of a Scottish unit operating for the Protestant side during the war, recorded in his campaign history a large-scale civilian attack on a surrendering imperial garrison; this attack was apparently retribution for the garrison forcing them to construct fortifications for the previous winter. Soldiers did not fail to notice their standing in peasants' eyes, and this colored their interpretation of unwillingness to share food and clothing. Perceiving themselves spurned and even abused, soldiers were quick to use violence to assert their strength and social standing in claiming what they felt was their due. Finally, it is important to consider soldiers' mindset with regard to the nature of local civilians' enemy status. Wayne Lee provides a lens through which to consider military violence against civilians in his book *Barbarians and Brothers*. Lee examines restraint and cruelty as enacted by Anglo-American soldiers across the period 1500-1850, based on their understandings of their enemies either as savages who merited no restraint or as brethren to be reassimilated after the conflict — or punished for betrayal.

In the Thirty Years War, it is safe to carry this definition a step further. More than having a different set of meanings for violence, the peasants whom soldiers encountered did not know their way of life, with all of its pains and homelessness and exhilarations and codes. They were civilians, to whom military life and its standards were entirely foreign. No matter how much privation and fear influenced their relationships with soldiers, their fundamental inability to understand the soldiers' way of life underlay their interactions, and vice versa. Neither rebels nor brothers in the eyes of soldiers, peasants' relative "barbarity" dictated that fear and force were the only languages they would readily understand.

**De iniustitia belli: Violence Against Civilians in the Thirty Years War Joseph Berg
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The Peace of Münster, signed on 30 January 1648, was a treaty between Philip IV of Spain and the Lords States General of the Dutch Republic. Negotiated in parallel to, but not part of, the Peace of Westphalia, under its terms Spain formally recognised the independent Dutch Republic, and ended the Eighty Years' War.



**The Celebration of the Peace of Münster (1648) by
Bartholomeus van der Helst**